

STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL MEETING

MINUTES—Friday, May 8, 2020

JP Williams was acting chair for this meeting as Heather Denny was unavailable.

JP Williams called the meeting to order.

JP Williams motioned to approve agenda for this meeting

Jody Bartz 2nd

Approved

David Richards motioned to approve minutes from last meeting

Jodi Bartz 2nd

Approved

Updates on OPI were provided by Jenifer Cline, Dick Trerise and Mandi Gibbs.

The Stakeholder meeting was cancelled. The purpose of the meeting is to collaborate and give stakeholders accountability and involvement in federal reporting. The governor closed schools due to Covid-19 which has led to a traumatic impact on families, schools and employees. The sudden closure created the need to do quick thinking. Challenge estimates that 25-50% of households had no access to internet to support virtual on-line learning. OPI had to brainstorm, how to serve those children. Services provided are even more limited for children with disabilities who are limited in their ability to use technology.

The challenges of staff working from home without all the access to office equipment was discussed. Developing work arounds and maintaining privacy and security requirements. He stated that OPI staff have proven that they can work remotely, and many employees have indicated they would prefer to continue to work from home at least part time.

The panel viewed resources on the website designed to assist districts through the Covid-19 shutdown specifically addressing Special Education needs.

Emergency relief funds approved by the federal government were discussed. OPI expects 40 million for the state of MT from the Covid-19 relief. The formula for title 1 funds is the formula that will be used to determine the amount of aid districts will receive. A portion of the funds are discretionary and will potentially go to Special Education and rural communities.

How to be effective in a virtual environment, get the most out of virtual learning, and websites that could be helpful for educators. National organizations or assistant programs funded by OPI.:

- Learning Hub has 100 of online classes available.
- Virtual learning resources has tools districts might find valuable
- Director calls

During this time of school closures, it is important for educators to document due diligence and best efforts when parents are non-responsive. Documenting all attempts to provide services.

There are currently 75 special education directors in the state of Montana. Most belong to MCASE, which sets up weekly calls with directors with an agenda of new directives or questions that are relevant. The calls are well attended.

Questions regarding Covid-19 and Special Education being routed to a centralized email box, where questions are documented. Angie Griner monitors the email inbox and directs questions to Dick Trerise, where he can respond unless the question has bigger implications. If needed he forwards on the question to others within OPI to discuss so an appropriate consistent message is provided. Mandi Gibbs investigates the legal ramifications. OPI staff then will either send a response to just the individual or post to the website as guidance. This has allowed for a fast response to inquiries. OPI is also fielding questions outside of school closures.

Child Find organizers are trying to do what they can for now and improve and offer more when they can. Some of the challenges of assessing a child remotely are, legal and FERPA. There is guidance on the OPI web site. Grading guidelines have changed as a result of the challenges of school closures.

The annual performance report was submitted the 1st of April as required. Some clarifications of the report were required.

Call for public comment was made by JP. There were no comments made at this meeting at this time.

The State Personnel Development Grant offers states funds for professional development in the area of students with disabilities. This is a 5-year grant that OPI has received for the past 25 years and is set to end September 20th. The OPI team is working on the application for this grant. The team consists of Shelia Lovato, Allyson Chance, Tom Manthy, Marty Blair and Terry Barkley. OPI is looking at district level coaching, implementation of initiatives and increased sustainability of initiatives through this grant this grant. Hopeful OPI will be awarded this grant again but might not because OPI has been awarded the grant 5 times in the past.

Special Education Endorsement project status was updated for the panel. Program 4 teachers can get a special education endorsement and teach Special Education while they pursue the endorsement. Discretionary grant was awarded to MSU and to support students participating. There are no plans to end this program. Susan Gregory is the MSU contact person.

Discussed current weekly and Bi-weekly agency calls aimed at giving guidance to districts and other organizations across the state attached to education, regarding Covid-19. On these calls, OPI gives updates and then other agencies discuss what they are doing. These calls have opened up communication and help to create a consistent message and help address issues coming from constituents and as a resource for how to address issues from constituents.

Superintendent wants to create a task force to represent stake holders to look at how to support schools going back to on site learning. OPI Special Education wants representation on that task force. Applications to be on that task force are now available. Dick Trerise suggested a Special Education director apply for the task force.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or the CARES Act is Federal money, given to states for districts to address costs due to COVID. Montana received 40 million with 10% being discretionary. Working on getting money out to the districts is a top priority. The superintendent will decide where the 10% is spent. There is money for private schools. All monies must be spent on costs due to Covid-19.

Montana Parent Information Center wrote joint letter to families about flexibility and communication. OPI gives update in their monthly letter. Struggling with exactly what should be contained in the newsletter. Would love feedback from sped directors on what should be in the newsletter. Have written about resources on the OPI website and helped address grades and graduation.

LFC Education Subcommittee working on draft bill to include SPED into the base allocation. Talk in past 6 months how are we funding co-ops, and do we need to do something different to increase stability. Sped funding is not included in the base allocation. Needs to be approved separately and has caused issues with sped keeping up with general education.

19-20-year-old funding for special education services will come up in legislature but will probably have a hard time gaining traction.

Dave Richards commented DRM liked working with OPI and product was helpful. Dick agreed collaboration was great for sped students.

Early learning monies discussions are on going to support and fund preK. Subcommittees are meeting. Finishing up in depth subcommittee meetings and moving into action. They may bring up during the legislature session but not sure. Waiting to see what is decided so we know what the next step will be for special education students.

Next Advisory Panel meeting proposed for the beginning of July since fiscal year ends in June and OPI will know if the application was approved. Proposed date is: Thursday July 9th. 8:30-11:30.

Fall meeting dates, TBD.

In June we will discuss end of year data from districts.

JP motion to adjourn

Chad Berg motion

Dave Richards 2nd

Adjourned